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**Trends in Agriculture**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: It’s hard to believe 100 years ago, few farms had electricity or running water and the average value of land in Kansas was $35.45, according to the 1910 Census of Agriculture (which, by the way, was a 177 percent increase from the $12.77 value in 1900). Agriculture has certainly changed in a century, but we can even see changes from one census to another. Every five years, the Census of Agriculture sends out surveys to get a snapshot of farms across the United States. As we anxiously await the results of the 2017 census, we can find several trends occurring in agriculture across the country by comparing recent reports.

One trend that we have continued to see for many years is the decline in the number of U.S. farmers as well as the number of farms. In 1982, there were 2.48 million farms as compared to 2.11 million farms in 2012. Supporting these tendencies is the increase in the average age of the U.S. farmer. In 2012, the average farmer was 58.3 years old. In 1982, the average farmer was a mere 50.5 years of age. Nonetheless, the average farm size has increased from 418 acres in 2007 to 434 acres in 2012. The 1910 census showed the average farm size as 244 acres.

While we continue to see a decline in the number of traditional farms and farmers, there have been increases in other areas of agriculture from 2007 to 2012. Young, beginning principal operators increased 11.3 percent. All categories of minority-operated farms also increased with Hispanic operated farms increasing by 21 percent. In addition, organic sales have grown from $1.7 billion to $3.12 billion. Another area that has seen growth and changes are small family farms.

Small family farms now account for 88 percent of all U.S. farms, 48 percent of farmland and 20 percent of sales. There are four types of operations categorized as a small family farm. Those include farms whose operator has a primary occupation other than farming, farms whose operator is primarily farming, but grosses less than $150,000, farms that gross $150,000 to $349,000, and retirement farms where the principal operator is retired but continues to farm on a small scale. In 2012, small family farms accounted for 58 percent of direct-to-consumer sales such as farmers markets, road side stands and community supported agriculture (CSA) arrangements. They accounted for 17 percent of organic sales. These farms also held 40 percent of all U.S. cattle inventory and 89 percent of horse inventory. Only 16 percent of these farms depended upon the farm for the majority of their household income.

As a whole, U.S. agriculture is continually changing. Farmers have adapted to changing consumer demands, technology and equipment, to name a few. Today’s farmers are resilient and determined to keep agriculture alive in their communities, states and country. The Census of Agriculture tells a story of how agriculture is changing. Although farming and ranching does not look the same as it did 100 years ago, it has adapted to fit the needs of feeding a growing nation.

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